

## **Supplementary materials**

1. Focus group prompt questions
2. Reflexive considerations
3. Thematic table with participant quotations

1. Focus group prompt questions

- 1) Is there much known about how autistic women experience the menopause?
- 2) Are there things that you think might make menopause especially difficult for autistic women?
- 3) Do you think the menopause affects a woman's experience of autism / affects autistic features?
- 4) We're about half way through now. Going on from this, what do you think we need to know about menopause in autism?
- 5) What kind of questions do you think researchers should be asking about menopause in autism?
- 6) Do you know of any support which is offered to autistic women undergoing the menopause?
- 7) What kinds of support do you think would be useful?
- 8) We are going to ask each of you individually about your own experiences of menopause in the individual interviews that we'll set up with you later. However, is there anything else you'd like to say now, regarding autistic women's' experience of menopause?

## 2. Reflexive considerations

Qualitative analysis generally emphasizes reflexivity on the part of the researchers and the expectations and experiences that colour their interpretations, which are, like the participant voices, subjective and individual. Awareness of one's own phenomenological experience may be especially important in the field of autism (Howard et al, 2019), where a 'double empathy' problem describes the difficulty of achieving mutual understanding between neurodiverse and neurotypical representations of the world (Milton, 2012).

The researchers, in this case, approached the analysis with differing relevant experiences. One was a mother, and was in the 40-50 age range in which women typically enter the menopausal transition. One had personal and familial experience of autism, and of 'looking from an autistic perspective', which has supplemented her research experience in this field. One was an MSc student with a professional interest in autism.

3. Thematic table with participant quotations (emphasis added by authors). Questions that preceded each response are given in italics.

<u>Themes</u>	<u>Subthemes</u>	<u>Quotes</u>
<b>Lack of knowledge and understanding</b>	Professional versus patient expertise	<p><i>(Is there much known about how autistic women experience the menopause?)</i></p> <p>“I would say no... I'm not aware of any specific research.” (P3, Q1)</p> <p>“Only among a few autistic women, not among clinicians or anyone else.” (P4, Q1)</p> <p>“Almost nothing. As we know from research by x et al. at present there is still such a focus on people below the age of 25, and perhaps a few older men.” (P2, Q1)</p> <p>“No - only Wenn Lawson talks about it in their book on Older Adults and ASD... it's not research but they obviously have some knowledge about it” (P5, Q1)</p> <p>“I've not ever come across any information.” (P7, Q1)</p> <p>“The Autistica conference last year had a panel on aging and autism, life span and all that, but there is very little out there” (P6, Q1)</p> <p>“I just got another book by Theresa Regan about Understanding Autism in Adults and Aging Adults, but I don't think it includes anything on the topic [menopause] either” (P1, Q1)</p> <p>“I am doing a study on autistic women's lived experience so I would have come across something in the literature but I really don't think there is much” (P5, Q1)</p> <p><i>(Are there things that you think might make menopause especially difficult for autistic women?)</i></p> <p>“... lack of any clue from professionals as to how to best help... there was zero clue and zero interest.” (P2, Q2)</p>

		<p>“Doctors are (in my experience) relatively clueless about the biology of menopause anyway” (P4, Q2)</p> <p>“Even women doctors” (P3, in response to P4 above, Q2)</p> <p>“Not knowing you’re autistic on the first place – and then suddenly experiencing unprecedented phenomena which don’t correlate with ‘regular’ menopause, so you don’t know if it’s menopause or not. So you wonder whether you’re going nuts, or have some disease, or what. In fact, sometimes you DO go nuts and you have a disease as well.” (P4, Q2)</p> <p><i>(What do you think we need to know about menopause in autism?)</i></p> <p>“I think it would be good to know more about whether there tends to be a change in how autistic women's communication is impacted by the hormonal changes in our bodies... whether autistic women experience a heightening of communication difficulties during menopause - and, related to that, whether those changes are permanent or not.” (P1, Q4)</p> <p>“Measurable physiological differences between autistic and allistic women?” (P7, Q4)</p> <p>“How the menopause changes sensory sensitivities and the impact of mood swings and depression” (P5, Q4)</p> <p>“Appetite and how much we look after ourselves ie, dressing, washing, eating etc” (P5, Q4)</p> <p><i>(What kind of questions do you think researchers should be asking about menopause in autism?)</i></p> <p>“What changes occurred and the impact on everyday life for autistic women” (P5, Q5)</p> <p>“I would like to see some research into avenues of information dissemination particularly in ALL autism stuff. Having an uphill battle trying to educate professionals here...” (P4, Q5)</p> <p>“Measurable changes in the things we've just talked about; physiology, hormones, communication, sensory issues, executive function, moods, suicidal ideation or actual suicide, access to mental health support.” (P7, Q5)</p> <p>“What do we know already about menopause and physiology in females in general, and what do we know about the physiology (molecular and cellular, as well as considering larger structures) in various</p>
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		<p>autisms, that could serve as the basis for creating studies to deal with various suboptimal functioning conditions among autistic females?” (P4, Q5)</p> <p>“Comparing groups of NTs and their experiences with those of autistic women.” (P6, Q5)</p> <p>“Prevalence of mental health issues during menopause in autistic women” (P5, Q5)</p> <p><i>(What kinds of support do you think would be useful?)</i></p> <p>“Information to begin with to let women know what they might experience, that was a big part of thinking I was going mad” (P7, Q7)</p> <p><i>(Is there anything else you’d like to say now, regarding autistic women’s’ experience of menopause?)</i></p> <p>“How does experience of menopause affect work situations or studying” (P5, Q8)</p> <p>“How does experience of menopause affect relationships for autistic women?” (P1, Q8)</p> <p>“What about sexual relationships!” (P5, Q8)</p>
	<p><i>Negative experience with professionals</i></p>	<p><i>(Are there things that you think might make menopause especially difficult for autistic women?)</i></p> <p>“Doctors are (in my experience) relatively clueless about the biology of menopause anyway” (P4, Q2)</p> <p>“Even women doctors” (P3, Q2; in response to P4)</p> <p>“... lack of any clue from professionals as to how to best help... there was zero clue and zero interest.” (P2, Q2)</p> <p><i>(What kind of questions do you think researchers should be asking about menopause in autism?)</i></p> <p>“In spite of a plethora of scientific research into various autisms, there is a silo situation among researchers – the biomed guys and the psych guys don’t seem to talk much, and undergrads do <b>REALLY, REALLY irrelevant studies with awful erroneous and simplistic assumptions</b></p>

		<p>sometimes (like, all autistic people are ‘visual thinkers’; or autism is a two-dimensional continuum from mild to severe, and we want to test if [insert substance here] helps autism).” (P4, Q5)</p> <p><i>(Do you know of any support which is offered to autistic women undergoing the menopause?)</i></p> <p>“I have generally poor GP support with anything” (P3, Q6)</p> <p>“I have a good GP too... <b>It took me years to find one, and I didn't have money for a long time... I am now with a doctor who doesn't even seem to believe I am autistic.</b> In my own present situation after all these years, that is of less importance... <b>At least my current doctor sends me to a lab, and treats me based on those results.</b> I was DRASTICALLY low in cholecalciferol by the time I got to him, nearly ten years after I'd become perimenopausal, and probably about 3 years after my last menstruation – so deficient, that I was at risk of cancer. I was also low in oestrogen, although luckily a previous doctor had picked that up in tests and prescribed HRT formulated specially for me and made by a compounding pharmacy... Important against the context that <b>the psychiatrist didn't identify any of this important stuff</b>” (P4, Q6)</p> <p>(In response to sympathy on the above experience with a ‘bad doctor’): “Was a whole series of doctors. One of them wanted to give me homeopathy when I explicitly told him I don't want that.” (P4, Q6)</p> <p>(In response to P6's positive experience with their GP): “Ah so this is not an NHS scenario P6” (P3, Q6)</p> <p><i>(What kinds of support do you think would be helpful?)</i></p> <p>“Mental health support (hahaha, like that's going to happen - not CBT)” (P7, Q7)</p> <p>(In response to participant dropping out of chat): “We're not supposed to have empathy and be concerned about P2, I am told... (that was sarcasm)” (P4)</p> <p>“In your face [autism researcher who writes about empathy]...!” (P6, in response to P4)</p>
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	<p><i>Barriers to progress</i></p>	<p><i>(Is there much known about how autistic women experience the menopause?)</i></p> <p>“I've not ever come across any information. <b>Although I was undiagnosed when I started perimenopause 16 years ago so I wouldn't have thought to look for any.</b>” (P7, Q1)</p> <p>“Yes, I only self-diagnosed recently... I'm 62, and so had no idea about autism when I hit menopause.” (P1, Q1)</p> <p>“Yes I too wasn't diagnosed when I started to be perimenopausal” (P3, Q1)</p> <p>“I was also undiagnosed when I started perimenopause” (P4, Q1)</p> <p><i>(Are there things that you think might make menopause especially difficult for autistic women?)</i></p> <p>“Menopause generally is not spoken about anyway.” (P3, Q2)</p> <p>“Yes p3 - why is it so bad to talk about it?” (P5, Q2; in response to P3)</p> <p>“I think it's just a hangover from the 50s. The 60s sexual revolution never really reached the menopause, because those women have only been going through it in the last 30 years or so.” (P3, Q2; in response to P5)</p> <p>“Not having a network of female friends to talk about things with” (P3, Q2)</p> <p>“I wonder if our lack of close connections can be a barrier to accessing information that other women have through their networks?” (P7, Q2)</p> <p>“You don't know what is 'normal' only that it isn't 'normal' to you, let alone anyone else... Yes, P7, that's really what I was alluding to” (P3, Q2)</p> <p>“Having poor proprioception and interoception and alexithymia does not help when you are hit with all the hormonal changes.” (P6, Q2)</p>
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		<p>“If you don’t know the words for feelings, it’s hard to explain to clinicians what you need help with. (Already alluded to...)” (P4, Q2)</p> <p>“Lack of diagnosis/identity as autistic, for many. Thus lack of peer support to establish what is perhaps normal for those entering menopause.” (P2, Q2)</p> <p>“Not knowing you’re autistic on the first place – and then suddenly experiencing unprecedented phenomena which don’t correlate with ‘regular’ menopause, so you don’t know if it’s menopause or not. So you wonder whether you’re going nuts, or have some disease, or what.” (P4, Q2)</p> <p>“True but really hard to explain to others - particularly if you haven't been diagnosed at that point” (P5, Q2; in response to points made by P4)</p> <p><i>(What do you think we need to know about menopause in autism?)</i></p> <p>“I never knew how important ‘know thyself’ was until menopause. . I always thought self-exploration was a self-indulgence and I scoffed at it. I basically had a midlife autistic burnout [at menopause].” (P4, Q4)</p> <p><i>(What kind of questions do you think researchers should be asking about menopause in autism?)</i></p> <p>“Interested in undiagnosed compared to diagnosed autistic women - whether a diagnosis helps with self-awareness and therefore helps with coping with the big M” (P5, Q5)</p> <p><i>(What kinds of support do you think would be helpful?)</i></p> <p>“At the time I can remember not being able to identify or communicate any of what I was experiencing” (P7, Q7)</p> <p>“Support for non-verbal or those with ID to be able to understand what is happening to them during menopause” (P5, Q7)</p> <p>“P5, I was just starting to write something like that as well. We, at least, are all decent communicators. It must be dreadful if one is unable to express it at all!” (P1, Q7; in response to P5)</p>
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		<p>“I tend to rely a lot on library or internet research. Having a few articles or websites would be wonderful. However, <b>that assumes that one knows one is autistic.</b>” (P1, Q7)</p> <p>“I would probably have ended up out of work, mentally ill if I didn't find out I am autistic.” (P4, Q7)</p>
<b>Cracking the mask and adaptive functioning</b>	<i>Menopause amplifies autistic presentation</i>	<p><i>(Is there much known about how autistic women experience the menopause?)</i></p> <p>“I got diagnosed a couple of years ago but sort out an assessment when my menopause started.” (P5, Q1)</p> <p><i>(Are there things that you think might make menopause especially difficult for autistic women?)</i></p> <p>“I wonder how many women who get diagnosed in adulthood do so due to menopausal depression/overwhelm” (P5, Q2)</p> <p>“You can get gaslighted, because suddenly your behaviour looks more autistic than in the past, and then people around you think you’re making it all up to do some kind of wacko autism awareness or something” (P4, Q2)</p> <p><i>(Do you think the menopause affects a woman’s experience of autism / affects autistic features?)</i></p> <p>“My perimenopause started with a period of euphoric hyperactivity, continuing into a period of inattentiveness (I made proof-reading mistakes which I hadn’t made before.) I secretly took myself off for an ADHD diagnosis. Didn’t have any idea I was autistic, although I had autistic acquaintances and even decided that one of my colleagues is autistic, before I know about myself” (P4, Q3)</p> <p>“I think menopause can affect autistic features, but it probably varies according to how severely the individual is affected by their autistic traits” (P1, Q3)</p> <p>“When I talk about that time, I say, “My autism broke”. Before that, my autism was working fairly well for me, providing me with good job skills.” (P4, Q3)</p>

		<p>“My autism feels heightened now. I’m much more aware of my sensory issues for example and more prone to meltdowns” (P6, Q3)</p>
	<p><i>Communication and relationship difficulties</i></p>	<p><i>(Are there things that you think might make menopause especially difficult for autistic women?)</i></p> <p>“An inability to mask. I swear I have become more autistic sense starting the menopause.” (P6, Q2)</p> <p>“I always had terrible fights with my husband right before my periods - and that got worse during menopause. So for me it was hormonal.” (P1, Q2)</p> <p><i>(Do you think the menopause affects a woman’s experience of autism / affects autistic features?)</i></p> <p>“No problem with eye contact before menopause; suddenly it was huge.” (P4, Q3)</p> <p>“I really couldn’t control my emotions - quite embarrassing sometimes. Maybe ‘masking’ is not so effective whilst having menopausal symptoms” (P5, Q3)</p> <p>“Deffo - the cracks in the mask started to appear.” (P6, Q3; in response to P5 above)</p> <p><i>(What do you think we need to know about menopause in autism?)</i></p> <p>“Your everyday life, just to appear ‘normal’ is bad enough, but when M happens, it all gets too much” (P6, Q4)</p> <p>“I think it would be good to know more about whether there tends to be a change in how autistic women’s communication is impacted by the hormonal changes in our bodies.” (P1, Q4)</p> <p>“I think the sensory changes affect our moods a LOT. And I think that contributes to overwhelm, which affects communication negatively” (P1, Q4)</p> <p>“Tolerance levels to change and communication difficulties” (P5, Q4)</p>

		<p>“Most people have nooooooooooooo idea how dysfunctional some of us are at home... I live with my mother again now. Without that, woo, I dunno... Most people my age don't move back in with their mother and let an 80+ woman do 96% of the housework.” (P4, Q4)</p> <p>“I hear you P4. without my husband, i would not cope.” (P6, Q4; in response to P4)</p> <p>“Same here, with hubby” (P7, Q4; in response to P4 and P6)</p> <p><i>(What kind of questions do you think researchers should be asking about menopause in autism?)</i></p> <p>“One that comes to my mind is whether autistic women experience a heightening of communication difficulties during menopause - and, related to that, whether those changes are permanent or not.” (P1, Q5)</p> <p><i>(Is there anything else you'd like to say now, regarding autistic women's' experience of menopause?)</i></p> <p>“Sexual stuff: sensory pain makes you think it's a relationship thing -- like, why don't I want to be touched there? Maybe I don't love him? Why don't I love him?” (P4, Q8)</p> <p>“Oh, that's a HUGE thing, P4! Thank you for bringing that up!” (P1, Q8; in response to P4 above)</p> <p>“Relationships: well, my best friend got suicidal and developed PTSD because of MY meltdowns” (P4, Q8)”</p>
	<p><i>Sensory heightening and executive decline</i></p>	<p><i>(Are there things that you think might make menopause especially difficult for autistic women?)</i></p> <p>“...brand new food sensitivities, probably because of the changes in histamine regulation during menopause which (even at the best of times) can be dysregulated in autistic people.” (P4, Q2)</p> <p>“I developed more severe food issues since hitting the big M” (P6, Q2)</p> <p>“The sensory angle. So periods go from a standard type and regularity to becoming random, being runny and then bitty” (P3, Q2)</p>

		<p>“Those of us who are sensitive to heat and cold, with other sensory difficulties, will be doubly disadvantaged by the sudden hot flushes” (P2, Q2)</p> <p>“Sensory issues, particularly hypersensitivity which make the hot sweats and cold flashes hard to deal with” (P7, Q2)</p> <p>“For me, periods are super sensory. As a teenager they were very painful and heavy and I would be able to feel the flow through my body. This sensory aspect was heightened again in menopause” (P3, Q2)</p> <p>“Changes in body temperature, appetite, mood swings due of fluctuating hormones may be particularly unsettling because of autistic women’s sensory processing sensitivities” (P5, Q2)</p> <p>“Existing executive dysfunction which is exacerbated by menopause” (P7, Q2)</p> <p><i>(Do you think the menopause affects a woman’s experience of autism / affects autistic features?)</i></p> <p>“My autism feels heightened now. <b>I’m much more aware of my sensory issues for example</b> and more prone to meltdowns.” (P6, Q3)</p> <p>“My perimenopause started with a period of euphoric hyperactivity, continuing into a period of inattentiveness (I made proof-reading mistakes which I hadn’t made before.)... Then came the sensory problems, the meltdowns, the anxiety, and night-sweats which would have me moving several times a night to find a dry spot... Did I mention HECTIC ADHD?” (P4, Q3)</p> <p><i>(What do you think we need to know about menopause in autism?)</i></p> <p>“I think the sensory changes affect our moods a LOT. And I think that contributes to overwhelm, which affects communication negatively” (P1, Q4)</p> <p>“How the menopause changes sensory sensitivities” (P5, Q4)</p> <p><i>(Is there anything else you’d like to say now, regarding autistic women’s’ experience of menopause?)</i></p>
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		<p>“How does experience of menopause effect work situations or studying” (P5, Q8)</p> <p>“Yes, to work situations” (P7, Q8; in response to P5)</p>
	<p><i>Negative emotions and stress reactivity</i></p>	<p><i>(Are there things that you think might make menopause especially difficult for autistic women?)</i></p> <p>“I suspect that particularly for people with a need for schedules the unpredictability would be difficult as well.” (P1, Q2)</p> <p>“Yes, increased mood swings, huge rages, melt downs” (P7, Q2)</p> <p>“I definitely got depression and anxiety during the menopause - I also used to get it during my periods.” (P5, Q2)</p> <p>“<b>Increased anxiety and depression</b>, but not sure if this was menopause or increasing intolerance of the masking of my autistic traits.” (P7, Q2)</p> <p>“Yes, the mental health aspect is very hard.” (P6, Q2)</p> <p>“Depression and anxiety increased...” (P6, Q2)</p> <p>“I started panic attacks which I hadn't had before.” (P3, Q2)</p> <p>“Yes, increased mood swings, huge rages, melt downs” (P7, Q2)</p> <p><i>(Do you think the menopause affects a woman's experience of autism / affects autistic features?)</i></p> <p>“My perimenopause started with... then came the sensory problems, the meltdowns, the anxiety... Violence, self-injury, all these negative things which people associate with autism. Loss of speech at times – NOT selective mutism. Writhing and grimacing. Hitting head. Sitting in corner rocking.” (P4, Q3)</p>

		<p>“During menopause I was on 3 meltdowns per week at times. Now more like 1 per year... My meltdowns were of the nature that people would call a 'basket case'. Ableist term, I know, but you get the picture. Would strip down to underwear sometimes during a meltdown at work.” (P4, Q3)</p> <p>“I honestly thought that I would boss the menopause as I have had mental health problems most of my life and so I would be used to them. I was wrong!... I felt so angry a lot of the time, but I think that it was also emotional stuff going on as well.” (P6, Q3)</p> <p>“I really couldn't control my emotions - quite embarrassing sometimes” (P5, Q3)</p> <p><i>(What do you think we need to know about menopause in autism?)</i></p> <p>“I think the sensory changes affect our moods a LOT. And I think that contributes to overwhelm, which affects communication negatively” (P1, Q4)</p> <p>“Mental health issues at menopause could impact on suicidal tendencies” (P5, Q4)</p> <p>“That was me last year. Sertraline saved my life.” (P6, Q4; in response to P5)</p> <p>“Oh, yes suicidal tendencies should be in there. I was forever in that place of 'if it all ends now I'd be ok with it.'” (P7, Q4; in response to P5 and P6)</p> <p>“Yes indeed and I think that the extra stress all the above brings can result in feeling too tired and overwhelmed to carry on... It's like, your everyday life, just to appear 'normal' is bad enough, but when M happens, it all gets too much... I wonder if the low life expectancy for autistic women is linked to menopause because it all gets too much.” (P6, Q4; in response to P5 and P7)</p> <p><i>(What kinds of support do you think would be helpful?)</i></p> <p>“Single-minded focus on physical changes may make someone ruminate and fixate on them so very stressful” (P5, Q7)</p> <p><i>(Is there anything else you'd like to say now, regarding autistic women's experience of menopause?)</i></p>
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		<p>“...change management issues ought to be considered, too. We generally don't like change and menopause is a whole stack of them all at once.” (P7, Q8)</p>
	<p><i>Sleep, self-care and health behaviours</i></p>	<p><i>(Is there much known about how autistic women experience the menopause?)</i></p> <p>“... the sleep issues may well lead us into Alzheimers sadly” (P6, Q1)</p> <p>“I am doing dementia-prevention stuff already because my father pretty much died of dementia” (P4, Q1; in response to P6)</p> <p><i>(Are there things that you think might make menopause especially difficult for autistic women?)</i></p> <p>“Poor sleep because of hot sweats and frequent night time loo trips which make all aspects difficult” (P7, Q2)</p> <p>“Terrible sleep problems” (P3, Q2)</p> <p>“Oh yes! My sleep issues now are minimal. But then they were bad” (P4; in response to P3)</p> <p><i>(Do you think the menopause affects a woman's experience of autism / affects autistic features?)</i></p> <p>“Then came the sensory problems, the meltdowns, the anxiety, and night-sweats which would have me moving several times a night to find a dry spot” (P4, Q3)</p> <p><i>(What do you think we need to know about menopause in autism?)</i></p> <p>“Appetite and how much we look after ourselves ie, dressing, washing, eating etc... quality of life” (P5, Q4)</p> <p><i>(What kind of questions do you think researchers should be asking about menopause in autism?)</i></p> <p>“What changes occurred and the impact on everyday life for autistic women” (P5, Q5)</p>



		<p><i>(What kinds of support do you think would be helpful?)</i></p> <p>“Advice on self care would be useful, particularly as it is something that we can find difficult even before menopause.” (P6, Q7)</p>
	<p><i>Midlife identity and life after menopause</i></p>	<p><i>(Is there much known about how autistic women experience the menopause?)</i></p> <p>“Post-menopause is very nice except that I am exhausted all the time.” (P4, Q1)</p> <p><i>(Are there things that you think might make menopause especially difficult for autistic women?)</i></p> <p>“At this time of life one may experience the loss of a partner or ill-health as well so all becomes overwhelming” (P5, Q2)</p> <p>“I went through a period of being very "low" myself . . . but I had a lot of other things happening in my life during that period as well.” (P1, Q2)</p> <p>“If you're in a relationship, chances are your partner is also going through changes at about the same time and you may lose some of your supports there.” (P1, Q2)</p> <p>“Diseases can also flare up because of prolonged stress. This can suddenly lead to epilepsy when you were never epileptic before, or you get hypokalaemic sensory overstimulation... and so on.” (P4, Q2)</p> <p>“My sleep issues now are minimal. But then they were bad.” (P4, Q2)</p> <p><i>(Do you think the menopause affects a woman's experience of autism / affects autistic features?)</i></p> <p>“During menopause I was on 3 meltdowns per week at times. <b>Now more like 1 per year</b>” (P4, Q3)</p> <p>“Oddly, p6, I'm *less* prone to meltdowns now (I'm 62, though, so a bit further along). I'm more "in control" than I was in my 40's or even my 50's” (P1, Q3)</p> <p><i>(What do you think we need to know about menopause in autism?)</i></p>

		<p>“Losing partners, kids moving out etc and menopause all at the same time... losing parents too” (P5, Q4)</p> <p><i>(Is there anything else you'd like to say now, regarding autistic women's' experience of menopause?)</i></p> <p>“...you younger people, hang in there - it does get better once you're past it!” (P1, Q8)</p> <p>“One of my friends has a classic autism dx and a condition which appears degenerative. I hope that she will actually live long enough to reach menopause. I wish genetic testing was free ... This is actually relatively common in autistic people. Most of my friends have chronic illnesses of some kind ... We haven't even talked about Ehlers-Danlos and POTS and dysautonomia and mast cell disorders and menopause” (P4, Q8)</p> <p>“Being postmenopausal is grrrrrrrrrrreat! (Except for not being able to achieve 25% of what I used to due to constant exhaustion and focus issues.)” (P4, Q8)</p>
<b>Finding support</b>	<i>Scarcity contrasts with need</i>	<p><i>(Do you know of any support which is offered to autistic women undergoing the menopause?)</i></p> <p>“Nothing that is specific to autistic women. I would have LOVED to see a book that talked about it” (P1, Q6)</p> <p>“None. I'm about to join a women's ASD support group but it looks very general from what I've seen” (P7, Q6)</p> <p>“Not aware of any support” (P3, Q6)</p> <p>“Unfortunately just HRT and sertraline!” (P5, Q6)</p> <p>“Facebook. My GP is good.” (P6, Q6)</p> <p>“My counsellor is good too.” (P6, Q6)</p>

	<p><i>Advice and resources</i></p>	<p><i>(What do you think we need to know about menopause in autism?)</i></p> <p>“Sensory strategies that work for autistic women” (P7, P4)</p> <p>“Mental health support through the process from knowledgeable women to reassure...” (P7, Q4)</p> <p>“Executive function strategies” (P7, Q4)</p> <p>“YESSSS executive functioning support” (P4, Q4; in response to P7)</p> <p><i>(What kinds of support do you think would be helpful?)</i></p> <p>“Information to begin with to let women know what they might experience, that was a big part of thinking I was going mad” (P7, Q7)</p> <p>“Sciency information translated into layman’s language” (P4, Q7)</p> <p>“I tend to rely a lot on library or internet research. Having a few articles or websites would be wonderful. However, that assumes that one knows one is autistic.” (P1, Q7)</p> <p>“Practical solutions; how to deal with sweats and other sensory issues; mental health support” (P7, Q7)</p> <p>“Advice on self care would be useful, particularly as it is something that we can find difficult even before menopause” (P6, Q7)</p> <p>“Informal self-optimisation groups for autistic females. (Facebook, WhatsApp, etc.)” (P4, Q7)</p>
	<p><i>Two-way communication</i></p>	<p><i>(Are there things that you think might make menopause especially difficult for autistic women?)</i></p> <p>“If you don’t know the words for feelings, it’s hard to explain to clinicians what you need help with. (Already alluded to...)” (P4, Q2)</p>

		<p><i>(What kind of questions do you think researchers should be asking about menopause in autism?)</i></p> <p>“I would like to see some research into avenues of information dissemination particularly in ALL autism stuff. Having an uphill battle trying to educate professionals here...” (P4, Q5)</p> <p>“How can we harvest the experiences of autistic females and collate this information into support resources for patients as well as for clinicians and other professionals working in the autism industry?” (P4, Q5)</p> <p><i>(What kinds of support do you think would be helpful?)</i></p> <p>“We, at least, are all decent communicators. It must be dreadful if one is unable to express it at all!” (P1, Q7)</p> <p>“I can remember not being able to identify or communicate any of what I was experiencing” (P7, Q7)</p> <p>“Training for doctors in systems medicine in general.” (P4, Q7)</p> <p>“GPs/MH teams that are trained in autistic women's experiences.” (P6, Q7)</p>
	<p><i>Embracing individual differences</i></p>	<p><i>(What do you think we need to know about menopause in autism?)</i></p> <p>“We should stop treating it as a psychiatric issue. Yes, there is a psychology aspect to it, and it is extremely important to provide support and guidance for that... But menopause is physiologically triggered and most psychiatrists do not send you to the lab to try to understand what’s happening to your body. Instead, they put you on methylphenidate, lamotrigine, risperidone and other psychiatric drugs without looking at the body as a whole system and without freaking testing ANYTHING.” (P4, Q4)</p> <p><i>(What kind of questions do you think researchers should be asking about menopause in autism?)</i></p> <p>“Autistic women are physiologically heterogeneous ... So, against that background (and differences in culture, poverty, gender ID, race, etc.), simplistic biomedical questions that steer towards <b>one-size-fits-all</b> approaches would be problematic. ... What do we know already about menopause and</p>

		<p>physiology in females in general, and what do we know about the physiology (molecular and cellular, as well as considering larger structures) in various autisms ...” (P4, Q5)</p> <p>“Family studies would also be potentially useful. Some of our experiences may be due to "family culture" as well as to genetics or autism.” (P1, Q5)</p> <p><i>(Do you know of any support which is offered to autistic women undergoing the menopause?)</i></p> <p>(Responding to question: “What is it your GP does that makes you say she is ‘good’?”): She has always listened to me and was the one who put me forward for diagnosis in 2011. We discuss how I am feeling as she prescribes meds, but also treats me holistically. (P6, Q6)</p> <p><i>(Is there anything else you’d like to say now, regarding autistic women’s’ experience of menopause?)</i></p> <p>“We should consider how culture, poverty, extent of disability affects all this.” (P4, Q8)</p>
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